

THE MODERN METHODS OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Dagmar Kokavcova, Assoc. Prof., Ing., PhD
Matej Bel University, Faculty of Economics, Slovakia

Abstract:

This paper concerns to the innovative approaches to the management education; it analyses the new progressive forms and methods of young managers' preparation at the bachelor and magister levels at the university study programs.

More specifically, this paper will focus on the interactive methods of Action Learning. In order to establish a better understanding of this problem, the paper will identify the core aspects of learning process as well as the advantages and drawbacks of selected interactive method. It describes the practical using of advanced learning methods and offers the results of observation and research completed at the Slovak Matej Bel University and the partners' universities involved in the common national and international projects.

Key Words: Management education, Innovative methods, Case Studies, Action Learning

Introduction:

Due to the frequent changes in the external environment such as social, economic and political changes, managers are dealing with the variety of problems, from the simple to the more complex ones. Most of the problems require new solutions created as the result of the participative and creative work of all employees.

To prepare their graduates to be the most effective in the practical life, the universities all over the world must implement the modern interactive and participative methods in the study programs, based on combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences.

There are number of methods and techniques which stimulate the self-management, problem-solving, creativity and autonomy of the students (Theodoulides, 2012). Their ability to turn the theory to the practical and innovative solution is possible to develop and improve by using the real life cases and Action Learning.

1. Action Learning

Learning is a process of improving performance by experiencing an activity or observing someone else experience that activity (Fernandez et al., 2004)

"A little knowledge that acts is worth more than much knowledge that is idle" (Bergeron, 2003). There is the crucial idea which defines and expresses the necessity and importance of active and participative learning methods.

Transactional distance theory suggests that traditional distance learning methods may not effectively support the type of dialogue typical during the social reflection process that happens in the Learning Set during Action Learning.

A lot of value of professional development is not realized when learning is not put into practice. Pfeffer and Sutton refer to this as the 'knowing-doing gap' (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999).

One approach that addresses the knowing-doing gap whilst simultaneously developing skills for professional learning is Reg Revans' strategy called Action Learning in which learners apply what they are learning to real workplace challenges during the learning process.

Professor Reginald Revans is considered the father of action learning. He is the author of the formula:

$$L = P + Q$$

L = Learning, P = Programmed Knowledge, Q = Questioning Insight

Michael Marquardt (1999) expanded Revans's formula as follows:

$$L = P + Q + R$$

where R represents the reflection.

Mumford (1995) believes that action learning is so effective because it incorporates the following elements:

- Learning should mean learning to take effective action; this is the focus of action learning. Acquiring information and becoming better in diagnosing and analyzing have been overvalued in traditional study programs.
- Taking effective action necessarily involves actually taking action, not recommending action or undertaking an analysis of someone else's problem.
- The best form of action in order to learn is by means of working on a specific project or an on-going problem that is significant to the people themselves.
- People learn best with and from each other.
- As „colleagues in opportunity", people can share problems on which to take action.
- In action learning, the people providing help are crucially different than inexperienced professors found in many management study programs.
- Rather than being taught through case study or simulation, participants in action learning learn from exposure to real problems and to each other's insights.

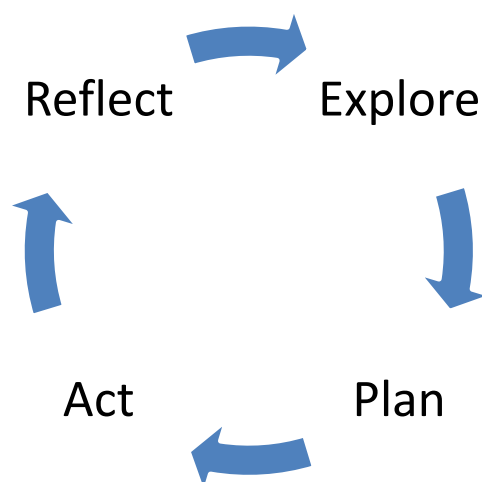


Fig.1 Action Learning
Source: own processing

An Action Learning usually involves a cycle of three processes: plan, act and reflect or a cycle of four processes: explore, plan, act and reflect (Fig.1). Each of these stages has an important role to play in the overall Action Learning process. Each phase in the iterative cycle is dependent on the others and all are driven by the workplace project.

Throughout the Action Learning cycle, teachers are supported to learn deeply from their experience and sometimes add to their knowledge by learning new things "just-in-time" for solving issues or enhancing practice. At the heart of this learning strategy is the workplace problem, challenge, initiative or idea that participants tackle. The fact that the Action Learning is a continuing process describes Fig.2.

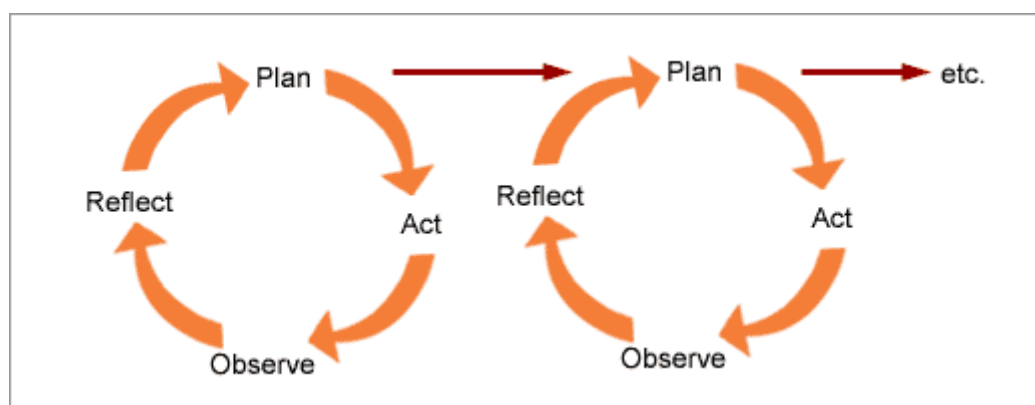


Fig.2 Continuing Process of Action Learning
Source: adopted by <http://gramconsulting.com>

The method has many variations but the general process as described by the World Institute of Action Learning is based on these important components. They are as follows:

- A Problem (project, challenge, opportunity, issue or task) the problem should be urgent and significant and should be the responsibility of the team to resolve.
- An Action Learning group or team; ideally composed of 4-8 people who examine an organizational problem that has no easily identifiable solution.
- A process of insightful questioning and reflection. Action Learning tackles problems through a process of first asking questions to clarify the exact nature of the problem, reflecting and identifying possible solutions, and only then taking action. Questions build group dialogue and cohesiveness, generate innovative and systems thinking, and enhance learning results.
- An action taken on the problem. There is no real meaningful or practical learning until action is taken and reflected on. Action Learning requires that the group be able to take action on the problem it is addressing. If the group makes recommendations only, it loses its energy, creativity and commitment.

The research literature continually affirms that teachers learn best by focusing their attention on their own practices, trying new techniques, getting feedback, and observing and talking with fellow teachers in a supportive school environment (T. Downes, et al., 2001, p. 53).

Action Learning is regarded as a highly successful learning strategy for achieving active, inquiry-based teacher professional development that incorporates inquiry and reflective practice (T. Downes, et al., 2001). Action Learning has been used successfully as a professional development strategy by many types of organisations across the world including a diverse range of industries from coal mining to banking, from environmental action to travel agency management (Revans, 1998; Weinstein, 1999). Robert Kramer (2007a, 2007b, 2008) pioneered the use of action learning for officials in the U.S. government, and at the European Commission in Brussels and Luxembourg. He also introduced Action Learning to scientists at the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen and to officials of the Estonian government at the State Chancellery (Prime Minister's Office) in Tallinn, Estonia. (www.wikipedia.org.)

Marquardt (2000) notes the Action learning has the power to provide both the best content (what) and the best methodology (how) for building the vital attributes of management and leadership for the twenty-first century. Leadership is built on the premise and expectation of getting things done. To take effective action is an essential task.

Action Learning is also used by the companies as diverse as Microsoft, Samsung, Dow, GE, Deutsche Bank, Boeing, Sodexo, Novartis, Nokia and many others to solve complex problems, develop leaders, build teams and expand corporate capability. Action Learning is employed at government, non-profit and non-governmental organizations such as the US Department of Agriculture, the American Red Cross, the McKay Foundation and the Fairfax County Public School System in Virginia, which is the 13th largest school district in the United States.

To summarize, we can consider the Action Learning one of the most spread an interactive method of education used both a) by the academic community and by b) „real business” in the various type of economic bodies all over the world. This method supplements or even replaces the conventional learning and teaching approaches and aims to the more effective preparation of the new managers and leaders for 21st century.

2 Innovative Methods in Management Study Program and Management Education

Using the modern teaching and learning methods in the education process there is an essential requirement mentioned in European Commission Agenda represented by Bologna process and Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Bologna Process launched the European Higher Education Area in 2010.

In the Bucharest Communiqué, April 2012, the Ministers of EU countries responsible for higher education, identified three key priorities - mobility, employability and quality, and emphasized the importance of higher education for Europe's capacity to deal with the economic crisis and to contribute to growth and jobs. Ministers also committed to making automatic recognition of comparable academic degrees a long-term goal of the European Higher Education Area. The Bucharest Communiqué builds on the Leuven Communiqué of 2009, which established priorities for 2010-2020 (http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/bologna_en.htm):

1. Ensuring a quality higher education system
2. Adopting a two- or three-cycle system of study (BA, MA, PhD)
3. Promoting the mobility of students and academic and administrative staff
4. Introducing a credit system (ECTS) for the assessment of study performance
5. The Recognition of levels: adopting a system of easily identifiable and comparable levels
6. The Active involvement of higher education institutions, teachers and students in the Bologna Process and student participation in the management of higher education
7. Promoting a European dimension in higher education
8. Promoting the attractiveness of the European higher education area
9. Lifelong learning
10. A European higher education area and a European research area – two pillars of a society based on knowledge

The Bologna process is a collective effort of public authorities, universities, teachers and students, together with stakeholder associations, employers, quality assurance agencies, international organizations and institutions. Every second year, Ministers responsible for higher education in the 46 Bologna countries meet to measure progress and set priorities for action; the next meeting will be held in 2014.

2.1 Implementing Case Study method and Action Learning in Management study

Started at the very beginning of 20th Century (1908) at Harvard University, the case study method (CSM) has become the favoured teaching tool of most of the world's leading business schools. The CSM describes real management issues in real organizations. Students are putting in the roles of decision-makers facing the problem or critical incident.

The next part of the paper presents the results, research outcomes, and personal experiences gathered and gained within thirteen years of pedagogical and research work in the field of management study and managerial practice. The implementation of modern interactive and participative teaching tools was investigated in many national and international projects and studies at our faculty. The examples of two of them as follows:

International project Erasmus titled Management through Autonomy (MANTRA 2006 -2008) was aimed to develop the common Master Study Program. Project participants were originated in four European Universities (Austria, Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia - Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University). Survey outcomes declare the necessity of increasing the graduates' social and managerial skills and abilities as follows:

- Discussing

- Negotiating
- Critical Thinking
- Argumentation
- Decision-making
- Self-management
- Creativity
- Problem-solving
- Team work

National KEGA project titled Innovative Management in Knowledge-based Economy completed at 2009 investigated the using of innovative teaching tools and methods by the teachers of our faculty. The respondents – 89 faculty lecturers – answered the questionnaire and majority of them (67%) approved using of interactive and participative learning approach. The teachers named the most popular and the most spread tools and methods: discussion (75%), case study (69%), model situation (53%), poster presentation (15%), and world café (8%).

Pioneered at the Faculty of Law Matej Bel University (MBU), CSM has been also used in learning process at Faculty of Economics MBU, since 1994. (Sekova, Durian, 2001). At the beginning, the only foreign companies' cases have been exercised in teaching the management subjects (Corporate Management, Strategic Management, and Human Resources Management).

An absence of case studies reflecting the real economic, political, and financial situation at the “domestic”, Slovak companies obliged to innovation of case study method. The teacher started to implement the new model of case study method – so called “*active case study model*”. Students did not study and analyse the classical case studies created and written by the foreign authors; academics or managers; there is a distinctive “*passive case study model*”.

Basically, the new approach to case method was based on **Action Learning Model** and it can be described as a four-step process. (see Fig.3)

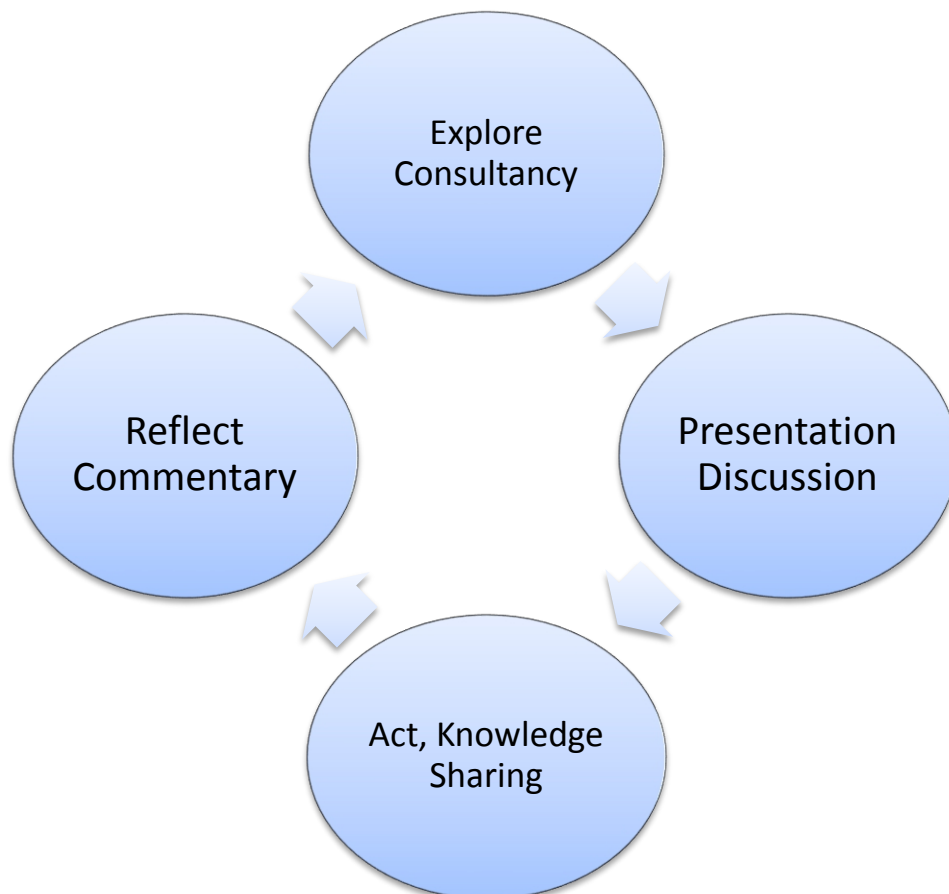


Fig. 3 Implementation of Action Learning Model in Case Study Method

Resource: own processing

In the **first step** students are required to contact and visit any Slovak or Czech company personally. Students worked in groups (4-6 members), and they had to talk and discuss with the managers of the company. They had to assemble enough information about the company's situation and present it during the lesson. Together with the other students in the class they tried to identify the problems, the "critical incidents". It's the **second phase** of the process.

The third step is about knowledge sharing, learning, and the problem-solving. The students searched for the solution, answered the questions, argued, explained and advocated their ideas and suggestions. Students are prompted to exploit their theoretical knowledge and turned them to **the action**. They must analyse the situation and express what they would do. They learn to persuade and inspire others, to reconcile differing viewpoints and to prioritize objectives.

The role of the teacher is to facilitate, "to coach", and to supervise this process. He or she, in the **fourth step**, reflects the classroom activities of the students, comments, and assesses the creativity, independence and goal-orientation of the students in particular case studies. Finally, the concrete students' solutions, proposals are discussed with the managers of the company and students have their feedback.

Conclusion:

Management and leadership are built on the premise and expectation of getting things done. To take effective action is an essential task. Preparing the young managers is the hard work and teaching tools and method have to follow and fulfil the requirements of knowledge based economy.

Marquardt (2000) notes the Action learning has the power to provide both the best content (what) and the best methodology (how) for building the vital attributes of management and leadership. To employ the Action learning with the Case Study Method can be considered more innovative and more participative approach to management study.

In contrast to a lecture-based approach to education in these methods both, teachers and students, must be active and participative, to be ready, willing and able to learn and share the knowledge. Quoting Galileo Galilee: "You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself."

References:

- Bergeron, Bryan. (2003). *Essentials of knowledge management*. John Wiley & Sons, United States of America. www.wiley.com.
- Fernandez, I. B., Gonzalez, A., Sabherwal, R. (2004). *Knowledge management challenges, solutions, and technologies*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc., New Jersey, United States of America.
- Pfeffer, J., and Sutton, R. I. (1999). *The knowing-doing gap: How smart companies turn knowledge into action*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Downes, T., Fluck, A., Gibbons, P., Leonard, R., Matthews, C., Oliver, R., et al. (2001). *Making better connections: Models of teacher professional development for the integration of information and communications technology into classroom practice*. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.
- Revens, R. W. (1998). *ABC of action learning: Empowering managers to act and learn from action*. London: Lemos and Crane.
- Revens, R. 1980. *Action learning: New techniques for management*. London: Blond & Briggs, Ltd.
- Weinstein, K. (1999). *Action learning: A practical guide* (2nd ed.). Aldershot, Hants. UK: Gower.
- Marquardt, M.J. (1999). *Action learning in action*. Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black
- Marquardt, M.J. (2000). *Action learning and leadership*. The Learning Organization Volume 7 . Number 5. 2000 . pp. 233- 240 MCB University Press. ISSN 0969-6474.
- Mumford A. (1995), *Managers developing others through action learning*. Industrial and Commercial Training, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 19-27.
- Kramer, R. 2008. *Learning How to Learn: Action Learning for Leadership Development*. A chapter in Rick Morse (Ed.) *Innovations in Public Leadership Development*. Washington DC: M.E. Sharpe and National Academy of Public Administration, pp. 296–326.

Kramer, R. (2007a). Leading Change Through Action Learning. *The Public Manager*, 36 (3) pp. 38-44.

Kramer, R. (2007b). How Might Action Learning Be Used to Develop the Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Capacity of Public Administrators? *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 13 (2) pp. 205-230.

Sekova, M., Durian, J. (2001). Management education through interaction of theory and practice. Brno. VUT. Scientific Conference Miscellany. 2001.

Kormancova, G. (2011). Human Capital development in Project Management In. *Ekonomika – Management–Inovace* No. 1/2011, y. III. Moravská vysoká škola Olomouc, Olomouc 2011. pp. 44 - 49. ISSN 1804-1299.

Theodoulides, L. (2012). Influence of creativity increasing managerial tools and methods in organisations. In: *International Scientific Conference, Management of organizations in real and virtual environment: opportunities and challenges IV*. Poprad. ISBN 978-80-557-0477-7

Internet Sources

www.felsofokon.hu

<http://www.wial.org/aboutAL/whatIsAL.shtml>

http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/bologna_en.htm

<http://gramconsulting.com/2009/06/10-strategies-for-integrating-learning-and-work-part-3/>